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TAGS: PGOV PREL UN SG
SUBJECT: FARBA SENGHOR-PRESIDENT WADE,S FALL GUY

REF: REF A) DAKAR 857 REF B)DAKAR 765 REF C) DAKAR 637

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY POLITICAL COUNSELOR DAVID MOSBY FOR REASON
S 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶11. 1. (C) SUMMARY: On August 28, Farba Senghor, Minister of Air Transportation and, more importantly, public relations officer for the ruling Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS) was forced to resign his ministerial post because of his alleged role in recent attacks on the newsrooms of "L'As" and "24 Heures Chrono," in Dakar "(Ref A). Senghor's removal, on the orders of President Abdoulaye Wade, culminates a two-month long battle between the government and the media. Sources near the President told Poloff that this whole polemic was actually planned by Wade himself. However, Senghor was dismissed because his behavior went further than what the President had envisaged. End Summary.

¶12. (C) Mamdadou Omar Ndiaye (strictly protect), a long time Embassy contact with connections in Wade's inner circle, told Poloff that Wade purposely politicized the beating by police of two sports journalists (REF B) following a soccer match in Dakar two months ago. Ndiaye said that at the time Wade was increasingly worried about the effects of an opposition-led "National Dialogue" (REF C). As a result, during a meeting of the PDS's Political Bureau shortly after the journalists were beaten, Wade ordered his barons to go after the press to divert independent media attention from the National Dialogue, which Wade reportedly characterized as, "The only decent action undertaken by the opposition so far."

¶13. (C) According to Ndiaye, the whole point was to make the press worry about its own survival. In that respect, the plan seems to have worked; for the past two months the newspapers have reported on virtually nothing but the harassment of journalists by the government. A few days after the meeting of the PDS Political Bureau, Senghor went on national TV where he declared that the government was going to cancel its subscriptions to private newspapers and stop advertising in all non-government media. In addition, media organizations would be forced to pay years of back taxes which would have bankrupted them (REF A). The "Government vs. the Press" preoccupation has apparently also distracted journalists from following-up more thoroughly on Senegal's increasingly difficult economic situation and credible information of massive misuse of budget resources by ministry and agency officials closely linked to special presidential projects.

¶14. (C) Ndiaye, who is also a senior member of the Committee to Protect Journalists, went on to say that Senghor's fall from favor began when his bodyguard and driver were arrested along with ten others (Note: those people have now been sentenced to between five to six years in jail and are currently appealing that ruling. End note) for being involved in the attack against the newsrooms, and when the Prosecutor General said that Senghor had ministerial immunity and thus could not be questioned. It was at this point that Wade

reportedly told his chief of staff, Pape Samb Mboup, that "(Senghor) is becoming a burden." Mboup met with Omar Ndiaye and the latter agreed that Senghor's resignation would satisfy the media community. Wade then told Senghor to resign and face possible prosecution.

Plots Within Plots

¶ 15. (C) The fight between the press and the government was also prolonged when the hawkish Minister of Interior, Cheikh Tidiane Sy, did not allow the policemen accused of beating the sports journalists to be brought up on charges. Sy is a Wade loyalist and a known hard-liner with little finesse. When the newsrooms were attacked, however, Wade and Sy were out of the country and the far more balanced and moderate Minister of Justice, Madicke Niang, was in charge of both Ministries. Upon hearing of the newsroom attacks, Niang ordered the police to arrest those involved. The head of the respected weekly magazine "Nouvel Horizon," Abdoulaye Bamba Diallo, suspects Niang purposefully ordered the Prosecutor-General to declare that Senghor could not be questioned in order to force the President to fire him in order to calm an increasingly tense situation.

And Yet Nothing Has Really Changed

¶ 16. (C) Comment: While the dismissal of one of Wade's favorite loyalists was dramatic, it remains to be seen whether or not Senghor will be convicted. "After all," Diallo pointed out, "Wade would never sacrifice his errand

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boy and we all know that whatever Senghor is saying is what Wade wants him to say. He will go out of the door and come back through the window." (Note: Senghor is also widely considered a favorite of First Lady Vivianne Wade).

¶ 17. (C) Comment continued: It is also interesting to note that the presidential decree removing Senghor from office specifically states that if the latter were charged, the High Court of Justice would be the competent body to try him. This decision was confirmed by President Wade on September 10 following a meeting with French President Nicolas Sarkozy. This court is made up entirely of National Assembly deputies, of whom 130 out of 150 belong to the ruling PDS. Moreover, in spite of his alleged sanctioning of the press crackdown and the role that one of his closest political allies played in the crackdown, Wade has emerged unscathed from the attack on the newsrooms. Equally important from Wade's perspective, the opposition-sponsored National Dialogue has dropped off the radar and media reporting on the government's increasingly dire budget situation has been anemic at best.

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